

Center for Public Health Preparedness Survives Kansas HEAT Exercise Tested Distribution Response to Bioterrorism Event

Imagine that hundreds of people across Kansas suddenly began seeking treatment at hospitals throughout the state for a mysterious, severe respiratory illness. That was the scenario for Kansas HEAT, a statewide exercise conducted this week. "HEAT" stands for "Heartland Emergency Antibiotic Tracking."

The KDHE Center for Public Health Preparedness (KDHE), in partnership with the Kansas Adjutant General's Department, local health departments and hospitals participated in Kansas HEAT August 28-31, 2006.

Kansas HEAT is considered a "functional exercise," the largest and most complex type of exercise that an agency can undertake. It is the first statewide exercise in Kansas that tested emergency functions associated with the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS), a federal cache of drugs and other medical supplies that can be delivered to any state within 12 hours of a state's request. SNS resources are maintained by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and are stored in secure, undisclosed locations throughout the U.S.

"We are extremely excited and pleased with the way health, safety and emergency management officials and hospitals across the state performed during this exercise," said Roderick L. Bremby, Secretary of KDHE. "We have learned many valuable lessons, and owe a debt of thanks to all who participated – especially Kansas' local health departments and hospitals, and those who came from other parts of the country to help Kansas conduct this exercise."

Planning for Kansas HEAT took place over many months. The exercise tested communications capabilities between state and local public health officials, as well as the state's ability to request, store and ship medicines from the SNS in response to a bioterrorism attack using weaponized pneumonic plague bacteria.

KDHE employees from several departments volunteered to assist in the unloading, staging, picking and packing of material from the SNS training module. The material was then prepared for shipping to the local health departments participating in the exercise.

Several local health departments tested their ability to receive the medicines and conduct clinics to dispense medicines to exposed or sick people. Hospitals simulated triaging, isolating, and treating patients under emergency conditions.

"Even in a widespread outbreak that would affect the entire state, our first line of defense will be the local health departments and hospitals," stated Mindee Reece, Director of the KDHE Center for Public Health Preparedness. "The communication, coordination and response by those organizations were tremendous."

Local health departments that participated included those located in the counties of Barber, Bourbon, Butler, Cheyenne, Crawford, Elk, Ellsworth, Franklin, Geary, Haskell, Johnson, Labette, Lane, Leavenworth, Linn, Ottawa, Phillips, Pottawatomie, Reno, Rooks, Russell, Sedgwick, Seward, Washington, Woodson and Wyandotte.

Participating hospitals included: Galichia Medical Group (Wichita), Hutchinson Hospital, Lane County Hospital, Meade District Hospital, Newman Regional Health (Emporia), Ransom Memorial (Ottawa), Rooks County Health Center, South Central Regional Medical Center (Arkansas City), Sumner Regional Medical Center, Susan B. Allen Memorial Hospital (El Dorado), Via Christi-St. Francis (Wichita), Via Christi-St Joseph (Wichita) and Wesley Medical Center (Wichita).

Officials from CDC in Atlanta, U.S. Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA), the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services observed and evaluated the exercise.

Exercise controllers – people who administer exercises for agencies – traveled to Kansas from across the country. The lead controller for Kansas HEAT was David Brown, Manager of Operations, Emergency Services Department, American Red Cross, Charter Oak Chapter of Connecticut. Brown also served as a controller for the national TOPOFF 3 exercise in April 2005.

Other members of the control team traveled from California, Colorado, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Missouri, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee. Having experts from other states as controllers is a common practice for large exercises like Kansas HEAT, in which the experts from the state hosting the exercise are required to participate as players.

“We are eager to conduct more exercises like this in the future involving even more agencies,” said Dr. Howard Rodenberg, Director of the KDHE Division of Health and State Health Officer. “This was an opportunity not only to learn, but to continue developing good working relationships with the same partners we would look to for help should an actual incident take place.”

The exercise was a required activity of the state under the terms of a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that provides millions of dollars in funding to Kansas for public health emergency preparedness and response.



Jeni Mulqueen watches as warehouse operations supervisor Mike McNulty signs for the SNS training module after it was unloaded and staged.



Michelle Miller, Jeni Mulqueen, Lou Saadi and Ronda Sanders watch as a member of the National Guard prepares a pallet to be shipped to a local health department.